

A GENERALIZED DEFINITION OF “IDEAL [STALE]MATE”

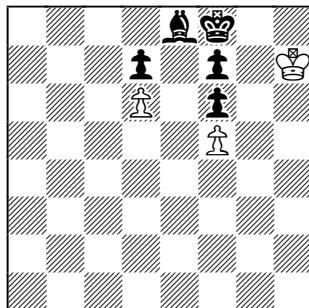
Dr Ian Shanahan, 5.xii.03 & 8.v.16.

On p.iii of Eugene Albert's **Ideal-Mate Encyclopedia**, Volumes One and Two (1999–2000), the author quotes from his 1966 compendium **Ideal-Mate Chess Problems**:

The artistic principle of economy in chess problems requires use of the minimum possible force to show any given thematic content. An important related concept is the model mate, in which every square of the Black king field is either guarded by only one White man or else blocked by a Black man, and every White man with the possible exception of king and pawns guards at least one square. ... *An ideal mate [delivered by White] is a model mate in which every White man guards, king and pawns included, and every Black man blocks. For a mate by doublecheck, both checks must be necessary.* [italics added]

I propose that, for Fairy genres where [stale]mate involves factors beyond merely guarding or blocking squares in a [stale]mated King's – or, more generally, a Royal unit's – field, such a definition of *ideal [stale]mate* is inadequate. Consider, for example, Circe Rex Inclusive – also known as “Circe RI”, “King Circe” or “Total Circe”. Here, in addition to the usual Circe rules, captured Royalties are reborn on their game-array squares, if vacant, necessitating a distinction between ‘Royalty *en prise*’ (i.e. under attack) and ‘Royalty in check’ (*en prise*, but also threatened with permanent removal from the board because its rebirth square is occupied). So, to accomplish checkmate in Circe RI, the checkmated Royalty's home square needs to be occupied by (i) a unit of the opposite colour, (ii) by the checkmated Royalty itself, or (iii) by some other unit of the same colour which must itself be locked in place – entombed by surrounding like-coloured units, lest it annul check by vacating the attacked Royalty's rebirth square. Clearly, then, such blockading and occupying units are as crucial to the checkmate as those that directly control the checkmated Royalty's field. (When a chess problem's stipulation calls instead for stalemate in Circe RI, such units must themselves be immobilized somehow, yet without the Royalty in question being *en prise*. Consider **1**, below – loosely derived from the finale of Ingleton's **3**:)

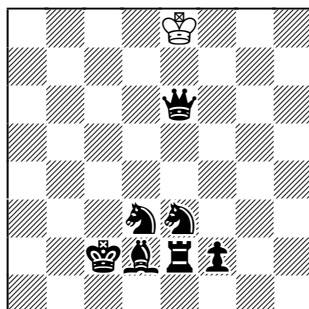
1. *Ideal stalemate* in Circe RI



Obviously, in Orthodox Chess, this is an impossible position. However, in Circe RI, at least one of the bPs on d7 and f7 have been reborn so as to incarcerate the bB on e8. I maintain that the stalemate here is in fact *ideal*: bPf6 has the *sole* function of blockading bPf7; and wPf5, likewise, serves only to blockade bPf6.

2. Ian Shanahan

2 HM *The Games and Puzzles Journal* 1987-1988



H#5 Circe RI

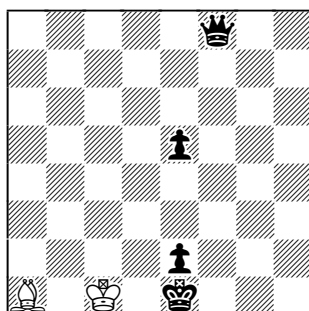
Concerning **2**, the judge (Hans Gruber) wrote:

Intuitively it is an absurd thought to use the bQ to block the bK's home square, because the bQ itself needs five blocks. In a very Circe-specific solution the wK has to plan the capturing sequence very exactly after he is set into a rather funny quadruple check.

2's solution is 1.Q×e8(Ke1)++++ K×e2(Ra8) 2.Rd8 K×f2(Pf7) 3.Kd1 K×e3(Sb8) 4.Sd7 K×d3(Sg8) 5.Se7 K×d2(Bf8)≠. Let us now analyse this checkmate position in detail. The wK alone gives check; he, solely, guards each square in the bK's field and even protects himself – 6.K×d2??(Ke1) would be illegal self-check (such Circean self-protection is also known as "Circe taboo"); the bQ squats upon e8 (the bK's rebirth square) and all remaining units bury her *in situ*, smothering any possible bQ motion. Thus we observe in the denouement of **2** that: (i) every unit on the board – apart from the mated King himself – participates in the checkmate; and (ii) every particular avenue of escape from checkmate is *uniquely* thwarted, so there is no overlap of specific mating functions between units. **2** also displays a picturesque geometric motif, in that its initial low-down trapezium is progressively transformed into an exalted rectangle in the checkmate!

3. Aubrey Ingleton

4 HM *The Problemist* 1986

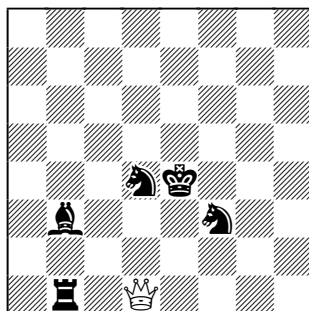


H#6 Circe RI

3 likewise exhibits Circe-RI-type occupation of e8 – this time by a walled-up bR. **3** solves by 1.Kd2 K×d2(Ke8) 2.e1R Kd3 3.Re4 K×e4(Ra8) 4.Qg7 K×e5(Pe7) 5.Kf8 Kf6 6.Re8 K×g7(Qd8)≠. The presence of a wB in **3** allows a rather unusual Circe-RI mate, whereby the bK partakes in his own doom on f8 by shutting off the bR's eastward getaway. Moreover, the bPe7 fulfils two distinct checkmate rôles – helping to incarcerate the bR as well as blocking one of the bK's potential flight-squares (e7) – and so too does the bR, who sits at e8 both to preclude a royal rebirth and to stop the bK's flight to e8. Again, in the mate-picture of **3**, criteria (i) and (ii) above have been satisfied, so my contention is that both problems here end with an *ideal mate*.

4. Manfred Rittirsch

5 Pr *Diagrammes TT(C)* 1993 – version



H#2 AntiCirce 2.1.1.1

In Rittirsch's well-known miniature AntiCirce gem **4**, the two solutions are 1.Bg8 Q×b1(Qd1) 2.Se5 Qf3≠ and 1.Sd5 Q×b3(Qd1) 2.Rb8 Qd4≠. The wK originally resided on d7; however, his presence means that both checkmates would merely have been *model mates*: were the wK to be absent, as here, they would both, I assert, then become *ideal mates*. Notice the *funktionwechsel* between the bB and the bR, by which

they alternate rôles in occupying both bS's potential rebirth squares (g8 and b8, respectively), thereby guaranteeing the illegality of S×Q, which would otherwise refute the wQ's checkmate: they are both definitely critical for the checkmate, and fulfil their duties uniquely.

So: we are now in a position to establish a **generalized definition of “ideal [stale]mate”**, hence I somewhat tentatively proffer the following postulate (which, needless to say, manages to encapsulate Eugene Albert's ‘traditional’ conception as declared at the outset):

A [stale]mate is *ideal* if, and only if, each unit present – but not necessarily the [stale]mated Royalty – *uniquely* counters some potential means of refuting the [stale]mate.

This succinct formula strikes me as completely watertight, since it seems to account for all contingencies. I do welcome any feedback, and can be reached at <ian_shanahan@hotmail.com>. Chess compositions featuring non-orthodox ideal [stale]mates within Fairy stipulations besides Circe RI or AntiCirce would also be most welcome. (For instance, does anybody know of any examples in Sentinels or any of its variants?)